

Teacher Commentary Transcript

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PRIOR TO THE LESSON

J: Talk to us about the flow of the unit. You've done a few things already, and how did today fit into where you started and where you're going.

I: We always start our unit with what we think we know and what we are wondering. That drives our research. So we started that about 2 days ago. Sometimes that takes a bit of time when we're starting a new unit. Today was the first day they actually sat down with books and started the research. I think you could tell because they were really excited and into it. So today was more, we have what we think we know, we have what we're wondering about, let's see if we can learn anything new, let's see if we have any confirmations or misconceptions about what we thought we knew before, let's see if we can find any answers to our questions. As the unit progresses, we'll always go back to that RAN chart and adjust it as we need to. Are we answering our questions, are we finding out new things, confirmations, misconceptions. So that's where today fell.

J: And you chose penguins...

I: They chose penguins! I gave them some options. This is a teacher trick. I went by what do I know I have ample resources on – I checked out our classroom and school library, my home town library, the internet, and looked for what I have enough resources on to do some decent research. And I came up with a list of about five animals – monkeys, penguins, spiders. I had a list. It wasn't just pick any animal, it was ones I had resources on. And when I said penguins, they were just, oh, yes, we love penguins. And I was, oh, good, I like penguins too. Then they voted. Penguins got 15, so 10 people wanted something else, but they're all OK with penguins because they know that next week they'll get to pick their own animal. 16:35 So one little girl already says she wants to do ponies, one wants skunks, so it should be interesting.

J: So you're starting out with one animal so they'll learn what they do as a researcher,

I: Right, they'll learn the process of researching animals.

So we'll finish the whole group one, and that's really to get the structure and the procedures for how you research animals, and we're all doing the same one, so we're all in this together. Then next week when finished with penguins, I'll gather resources for the animals that they want to research. And they'll do the same stations, but they'll just do their own animal.

MODEL

J: How do you choose your mini-lessons for each day as you move along through the unit? Today you definitely showed them how you would get new information from the book and how to use the graffiti board to do that.

I: Definitely when we're doing this whole class it will be a mini-lesson on how to do the station. So today it was how do you look at this picture and find out information and how do you put it on the board. The whole point of putting it on the board is so there is some documentation of what they are learning. I love how when I went around and I said, "Well, what did you mean by this" – I can't really

tell what it is, but he can say, “That’s the Daddy sitting on the egg,” or “That’s the brown penguin because they’re different colors.” Something that they’ve put on that board to help them remember what they’ve learned. So first part of the unit is review of the stations. Mini-lessons are based on what I see. Like one time I did a mini-lesson on not copying. When we started graffiti board, they think they are supposed to just copy the pictures, they aren’t quite getting that they’re supposed to learn, and interpret and put what they are learning. So a mini-lesson I’ve done with graffiti board is we’re not copying the words, we’re not copying the pictures, we’re looking at them and interpreting them and putting on the board what we’ve learned. That happened, the first time we did it they were just copying these words, and I was, “Oh, no!” So then I took a step back and I said, remember, we’re not copying, we’re researching, so we have to look and interpret ourselves.

J: And your modeling really helped with that.

GUIDED PRACTICE 2

J: When the kids are turning and talking, then you’re listening and finding what could be good examples for the class? Is that how you think about it?

I: Right. And I’m always going back to that chart, because I think that RAN chart is such a good display for our learning. So today whenever I showed them a picture and when one group had a good question, I went ahead and added it. I thought it was something good for everyone to know and to hear.

J: And when you had one little boy share that the baby gets out of the egg with its beak, you probably had a conversation with him that helped him articulate that, right?

I: Yes

J: So they can see what new learning looks like.

I: And that was a good example where he looked at it and I knew they had had a question of how do they get out of the eggs, and so that was where we looked at it and then I took them to the words, and we read the words. When there’s some adult support, I think it’s OK to read the words to them so that’s how they learn. So I said, “Let me read this to you and see what you get out of it.” And he said, “Oh, they use their beaks

J: That’s great. You’re showing them how people learn. You start with the picture but the words are going to give you more information so you understand better whether you’re right or wrong.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE 1

J: So when you’re conferring with them, talk about what you do, what you’re thinking about.

I: I’m seeing what they’re doing, are they looking at pictures, and I’m talking to them about what are they seeing. If they’ve already drawn, I ask them can you tell me what you’ve learned. I’m seeing if they are getting information, are they learning anything. Some of them might need some help looking at the picture and learning, some might need help clarifying some things. One thing I don’t want them to do through this is learn wrong information. So if they think something is a shark and it turns out it’s actually a whale, I want to clarify that it’s a whale. So that’s what I’m doing – seeing what the kids are doing and going off of there. Kind of just what help do they need through the process. Do they need me to help them with how to look at the picture, do they need me to help them put it on the board, do they just need to talk it out, whatever they need is what I’m here for.

One little boy noticed that the momma’s leaving, and the daddy’s sitting on the egg. So that could be a

conversation they have together, and share what they're finding. Here in my book it shows this, and she can say, oh, ok. I love how the research puts it in their hands. The kids are more than capable of teaching each other this stuff. I don't need to say, "No, it wasn't this, the little boy who found it, he can tell her. That really builds their confidence, it really does. They are really capable of teaching themselves this stuff, if you have the right materials and the right support.

SHARE

J: In preparation for the sharing, I noticed that you called on specific kids when they came back. Talk about what you try to accomplish in the sharing.

I: I try to pick children to share that have found an answer to a question the group had, or clarified something we were thinking, have a misconception or confirmation. And some of the things that they were sharing were just smart, new things that would be great for our new learning chart. So I try to pick children to share who can really add to our charts and to our learning. There was so much and we didn't have time to share it all. The beauty of this kind of environment, is that they will research penguins again tomorrow, so they will have a chance again. It's not a one day, one time kind of thing.

That's why I gave them a chance to turn and talk first, and then picked just a few that I thought would be great for the whole class to hear.

CLOSURE

J: And what are you accomplishing when you go back to the charts and move them into confirmations and misconceptions?

I: When we began these units, it takes them some time to get that it's what we think we know, we don't know it until we've researched it. So moving it - were we right, were we wrong, it's helping them see that as researchers we have these ideas, but we don't really know if it's right or wrong until we research it. Same thing as an adult. I might have ideas about things, but it's not til we get down and start researching that we can either confirm it or call it a misconception. So I'm trying to have them see that what they think they know is great, but it's really whenever we get into these nonfiction books or watch these videos, that we can either confirm it or say it wasn't quite right.

I: I love that, like one little girl said, "Well, we can be wrong, but it's OK." I want them to understand, like as an adult, it's great to think you know something, but when you're learning, that how we learn. You may think you know something and then you find out differently. I want them to understand that a misconception means we weren't right but that's ok, it means we were learning.

J: It means we were learning, exactly.

We thought we knew something, and guess what, we learned something new.

I: We learned something new.

REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

J: anything puzzling you or confusing today about what they did?

I: They all pretty much did what the goal was.

I guess I was a little puzzled by some who needed more support. Some who I didn't think would need so much support were flipping pages and telling me the story instead of what she learned, so I thought I need to talk with them about the difference between this research and a picture walk. So that could be a mini-lesson for next time.

J: Finally, any tips for people who are doing this type of work with Kindergarten kids?

I: I know when I started I was a little overwhelmed. I didn't know where to begin. So my advice is to do the whole group style with the same type of station is easy to manage, so maybe try something like that at first. Maybe try something like graffiti board with the whole class.

J; And also starting with the one animal, so they're all doing the same thing

I: Right. Keep it small. I think sometimes with research we think big and grand, so keeping it simple. I think the whole idea is putting it in the kids hands, not me spoon-feeding them information and having them remember it, so starting from what the kids know and what questions they have instead of a lecture type thing.

J: Or having very specific things you think they have to learn, so you're going to just tell them.

I: Even just starting from what they know and what questions they have, that could be manageable I think.